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ABSTRACT

California's Partnership Academies tangibly reflect not just rhetorical involvement but meaningful direct private-sector participation in the education process. The Partnership Academies and their link to vocational education are compared with other programs like Adopt-a-School and the Boston Compact. The roots of the academy are traced to similar programs like Philadelphia's Peninsula Academy which began in 1968. The premise of partnership academies is simple: if schools and local businesses join together, they can help turn around the future for at-risk children. Advantages of the program for both students and business are outlined, as are ways that businesses and schools can work together. Three components of the academy curriculum--academia, technical training, and jobs--are explained. A section on the problems of this unusual kind of partnership describes some of the implementation woes, essentially relating to school and business cultures. Partnerships that did and did not work are described in the next section. The conclusion examines student dropouts and their costs. Appended is information on the Institute for Educational Leadership. (RR)

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SCHOOL-INDUSTRY "PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES": PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Occasional Paper #11

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SCHOOL-INDUSTRY "PARTNERSHIP ACADEMIES": PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Occasional Paper #11

Cynthia L. Patrick
Stanford University

The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.
Edna McConnell Clark Foundation
September 1989

PREFACE

With the support of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) has been exploring the evolving relationship between the public schools and the business community. IEL has been particularly interested in examining the extent of business involvement with and commitment to resolving the complex issues pertaining to educational reform.

As we pursue these important issues, we would like to share our information with interested parties from the worlds of business, education, and government.

The enclosed Occasional Paper #11, School-Industry "Partnership Academies": Programs That Work, represents the eleventh of a series of Occasional Papers on Business-Education Relationships which IEL is disseminating. This paper, unlike many of the others in our series, focuses upon a specific sustained program, California's "Partnership Academies," which tangibly reflects not just rhetorical involvement but quite meaningful direct private sector participation in the education process.

We would welcome your reactions to this description of a concrete and proven school-business partnership which we feel is an important prototype worthy of emulation elsewhere.

William S. Woodside
Chairman, Sky Chiefs, Inc.
Chairman, IEL Board of Directors

Michael D. Usdan
President
The Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.

September 1989

School-Industry "Partnership Academies":
Programs That Work

Not so long ago, children who were not destined for a "college-track" high school career were often shuffled into non-academic, vocational education courses, which frequently had mediocre curricula and less-than-the-best teachers.

"Voc ed" was often a euphemism for classes in carpentry, auto shop, or home economics -- classes that offered little that reflected the job markets opening up in the "real world," where more jobs are professional, technical, and managerial. The "reality gap" was embarrassing to the schools, and critics sometimes accused schools of pushing vocational education students into academic ghettos.

Moreover, for many parents and students, "education" had become synonymous with "job preparation" -- at least in their expectations.[1] Their consequent disappointment when diplomas did not lead to jobs was profound.

"Vocational education" in the Silicon Valley (California) is getting a facelift. Some might say that it is also getting a name change: California's "Partnership Academies," adapted from Philadelphia's successful academies program, rarely claim the "voc ed" designation, and it's not too hard to understand why.

M. Hayes Mizell of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, an early funder of the Partnership Academies, admits: "While it was estimated that the [Silicon Valley] area had over 15,000 available jobs, vocational educational programs in the district were underutilized, especially by poor youth. Chief among the reasons for this was the perception among youth and their families that vocational education programs did not lead to jobs with a future."[2]

Partnership Academies (formerly called Peninsula Academies) are making an effort to bridge the gap between these expectations and reality. The big difference is industry participation -- in fact, a true 50-50 school/industry partnership -- that guarantees that the training received by at-risk high school students is geared to real jobs in growing industries. The intensive program, year-round for students who attend summer school for remedial work

or get on-the-job training in companies, helps students get summer jobs, find mentors, and formulate career goals. And, it encourages them to stay in school until they graduate.

Industries provide more than just money or equipment. They help schools stay in touch with employment needs in industry, acclimatize students to the work world, provide time and effort, and give emotional support to students who may not be getting it anywhere else.

It is significant that *Public/Private Ventures*, a national group that evaluates efforts to help the disadvantaged enter the work force, called the Academies "the best single model in the country for business involvement in the schools."

In overall concept, the Partnership Academies program is not unique; other states, other regions have developed similar models. American Express, working with the New York City schools started an "Academy of Finance" in 1982. It, too, was successful. Based on the New York City model, thirty such academies now exist across the nation. More generally, PBS's Nightly Business Report estimates that 140,000 firms across the nation are giving some assistance to schools.

What distinguishes the Partnership Academies from many other programs is that companies are not asked to shovel money down a dark hole. "It is performance driven, and businesses really like that," says Charles Dayton, one of the program's early sponsors and also, through Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE), one of its evaluators. "Companies are not giving away money regardless of how well the kids perform. Money is allocated on the basis of performance," says Dayton. "It's not a wishy-washy, 'bleeding-heart-liberal program' -- it's very hard-nosed. It relies on discipline; kids are expected to toe the line. They can't stay in the program if they don't."

The Partnership Academies program also compares favorably with other business partnership programs because -- like the businesses that sponsor it -- its goals are clearly defined and evaluated.

Dayton contrasts that with some business-school partnerships where the objectives are poorly formulated, and the results never measured -- where "businesses pour resources into the school and, a few years later, the companies and schools don't know what they've got."

However, Not all such programs are failures: Adopt-a-School, an approach that is widely used (the Los Angeles Unified School District alone has over 600 such programs), is based on one-on-one school-business link-ups where each partnership defines its own goals and rules. Although it is a popular approach, there is no programmatic model for the schools, and few outcomes of the partnerships have been rigorously evaluated.

Another paradigm is the Boston Compact which began in the early 1980s. With this program, Boston businesses said they would make a commitment to hire thousands of public high school students for summer and post-graduate jobs in technical and clerical positions -- a step up from the kind of jobs the school's students normally attracted -- if the schools would make a commitment to improving grades, standardized test scores, and daily attendance.

Years later, the results were disappointing: the drop-out rate in the schools had gone up, not down. Test scores had not changed significantly. "Businesses were very disillusioned," says Dayton.

Although the Boston Compact has some interesting features -- notably that it provides business and schools a good way to set common goals -- and is being adopted in other states, it does not provide a real program model that defines what changes must occur inside the classroom.

Most other school-business partnerships offer, at best, short-term interventions: field trips, a brief spell of coursework, or job preparation. The Academies, by contrast, offer an intensive, 3-year sequence of education and training.

That sounds expensive -- and it is. Dayton estimates that the annual cost per student is about $1,000 above and beyond the school's normal allocation. Some Academies have filled the gap with grant money; currently, California's Academies are being underwritten by the state.

But for participating companies, the financial contribution has been minimal. In one case, a group of 10-15 companies jointly contributed $50,000 to the Academies. It was the Academies' biggest corporate contribution. More often, support comes through donating

equipment. "It's not particularly expensive in dollars and cents," Dayton qualifies, "it mostly involves volunteer work."

Volunteer work is extensive, whether it involves steering committee work to shape the Academy curriculum, or the efforts of the company mentors who work one-on-one with students. But, its supporters argue, these volunteer efforts pay off in measurable gains: the Partnership Academies have been extensively evaluated, and results so far show that they work.

How the Academies Began

The prototype for the Peninsula Academy program was born in the riots of 1968. In the wake of these significant events, the Philadelphia Urban Coalition, in collaboration with the Philadelphia Board of Education, responded to the need for youth programs by establishing an industrial academy for inner-city youth, the Academy of Applied Electrical Science, Inc. Many of the first Academy students, for one reason or another, did not qualify for admission into the city's established vocational schools.

A business academy opened in the city in 1972, and an automotive academy in 1975. Nine more academies have opened since -- in horticulture, environmental science, health, and other fields. Today, these academies graduate about 660 students annually.[3]

The Philadelphia experiment was successful enough to inspire successors. In the San Francisco Bay Area, Sequoia Union High School District Superintendent Harry Reynolds and Hattie Harlow, director of the Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition, both black, were concerned about the quality of education in East Palo Alto, a low-income, largely black community within Reynolds's district. Around 1980, they received a planning grant to replicate the Philadelphia Academy model, with the Stanford Mid-Peninsula Urban Coalition acting as a broker to secure funds. From the outset, the Coalition had strong business support. Among the companies represented on its board of trustees were Hewlett-Packard, Lockheed Missiles & Space, Xerox, Varian Associates, and Syntex. In 1981, the Academy program was

replicated at two of the district's schools: the Computer Academy at Menlo-Atherton High School and the Electronics Academy at Sequoia High School.

The premise of all the Partnership Academies was simple: if schools and local businesses joined together, they could help turn around the future for at-risk schoolchildren. The Academies would be three-year, schools-within-the-school, and businesses would offer mentorships, speakers, field trips, equipment for training, jobs, and other benefits.

According to one Academy teacher, "It's an old-fashioned approach to a contemporary problem [school dropouts]. It's the little red schoolhouse with a few students, whom the teacher gets to know well. She has time to communicate with them and to get involved with their families. The students finally feel important. The big difference is the industry link-up."[4]

For the students who chose to enroll in the Academy program, the draw was the potential to acquire the skills that would give them careers. For the industries involved with the Academies, the obvious benefit was the chance to attract new workers to the company. As Dayton says, "Many high-tech companies are hurting for certain categories of employees."

That benefit is certainly not guaranteed -- after all, the graduates may eventually work anywhere. Nevertheless, the companies claim that they are breaking a cycle of low expectations, poverty, and underemployment in an entire community. Whether or not a particular child becomes a post-graduation employee, therefore, is a smaller issue; a sister, or brother, or schoolmate might. The company is changing the nature of the job pool and changing the way it is perceived within that pool.

As Dayton explains, "Before enrolling in the Academy, many of these kids were scared to set foot in these companies. They were scared even to have an interview with them. They have no family role models for company work at all -- let alone role models for work in prestigious companies such as those participating in the Academy program.

"After their first summer work experiences, they come back as seniors all puffed up, with juniors and sophomores looking up to them. The change in confidence level is incredible. A whole new world is opening up to them."

For the companies, it's also a public image booster that provides a powerful way for its employees to be involved with young people -- the people who will, after all, be their future co-workers.

In the end, therefore, most companies articulate a combination of self-interest and corporate altruism as the biggest motive for their involvement. Put simply by one industry participant, "Companies owe something to the youth of America." Echoed another, "We are corporate citizens. We have a responsibility for affirmative action and for providing economic opportunity."[5]

This responsibility was, moreover, one the schools simply weren't equipped to handle. The schools lacked time, breathing space, and the equipment to develop and manage such a program on their own. Finances are always a heavy constraint on schools, but in this case the need was more than monetary. Said one Urban League representative in Pittsburgh, "I say to business, 'I'm not after your money. I just want your cooperation.'"

Another broker agency director expressed similar thoughts, "Go to business for what is unique to business -- not money first and foremost. You need the involvement of people. ... You need jobs, you need mentors, you need advocates for the program outside the school system, you need help on the curriculum."[6]

Industry as a Helpmate

In the Academy's system, business is not just called in to foot the tab and rubberstamp the school's academic decisions. Business and schools work together, through a joint steering committee, to develop the curriculum that is at the heart of the Partnership Academies. This joint planning guarantees that the coursework will be current and relevant to the industry the students hope will someday employ them.

Students are selected for the Academy's school-within-a-school sometime during the ninth grade. Once selected, they embark on a program of rigorous academic and technical coursework.

Three components describe the Academies' curriculum:

- an academic component that emphasizes the key disciplines of English, mathematics, and science, and that is clearly related to the needs of the technology
- one course of technical training each semester
- exposure to real jobs through work-study experience and paid summer employment.

These program components are bolstered by field trips, guest speakers, individual mentors, and career guidance as an integral part of the curriculum. Representatives from industry may address students on such topics as resume writing and job interviewing skills. They may even serve as instructors-on-loan. Field trips to on-site workshops and tours make students more familiar with the workplace.

Although programs differ from district to district, according to the various industries involved (e.g., computers, health, electronics, business) and the needs of the school or district, four common elements prevail:

- The Schedule: Students study English, math, science, and the vocational subject in a 4-hour block of time. This leaves an afternoon of flexible time to go on field trips, listen to speakers, work with mentors, or participate in other Academy-related activities -- without missing other classes. As needed, students supplement this instruction with any remedial work they might need in English, math, science, or other subjects.
- The Staff: Students have the same teachers for three years. Classes are small, which allows teachers to give more attention to each student. The four Academy teachers (one teacher each for math, science, English, and the technical subject) work together as a team. Their workload is reduced so they have one free period to meet together and ensure that the curriculum subjects mesh, and also to guarantee that students are keeping up with the material.
- The Mentor: Students have a mentor from participating industries during their junior year. This popular aspect of the Academy program pairs each student with an employee in the participating industry. The Academy staff matches the mentor and student on

the basis of gender (same-sex matching), cultural or ethnic background, and career and personal interests. Mentors may, for example, offer career guidance, share a project with the student, prepare students for job interviews, discuss college plans, lunch together, and, of course, discuss areas of technical knowledge. This part of the program is welcomed by students, and, from the comments of one Menlo-Atherton student, it's not hard to understand why:

> I feel that my mentor is the kind of person who cares about the minds of the young people of today. My mentor is always there when I have a problem that either involves school or something personal. . .[He] was the person who convinced me to keep furthering my education. . .he was the one who enrolled me in the PSAT test last fall, and he also bought me the SAT preparation book. He is also the one who pushes me to reach for my goals in life.

- The Work Experience: Students get access to summer job opportunities with participating industries. After their junior year of high school, students assume summer jobs related to their area of technical study. Additionally, in the spring semester of their senior year, students with strong academic records may be placed in part-time jobs. This is one of the Academy's strongest incentives for students, and the effort by industry to find jobs for these students is genuine. For example, 95 percent of the seniors at Menlo-Atherton High School were placed in jobs -- among them positions as production assembler, assistant electronics technician, computer operations trainee, data entry clerk, assistant lab analyst, and telecommunications operator.

In all aspects of the Partnership Academies program, industry, through its representatives and mentors, helps guide students' career decisions and shapes their vocational training. Their role in the more traditionally academic side of students' training is also significant, and more than one student has claimed that their coursework began to "make sense" when it was tied to the needs of vocation and workplace. Said one, "Working on that job really made me understand how important it was to stay in school." Echoed one Academy English teacher, "I make the English real: 'You need to learn this because that letter you just

wrote is going to Hewlett Packard.'"

The Problems of an Unusual Partnership

The path of industry-school collaboration, like the path of most joint venturs, is never smooth; the Academy program has often had implementation woes. The April 1988 evaluation of the California Academies stated that although the program's prototype is capable of substantially improving students' school and career possibilities, actually developing effective on-site school programs is difficult.

Some of the program's administrators say that much of the industry-school tension can be levelled by adjusting the expectations each group has with the other. "Industry and education people are in two different cultures, and they talk two different languages. That dooms a lot of programs," says Keith Bush, program manager for the East Side Electronics Academy in San Jose.

The problem is not unique to the Academy. Bush spoke at the 1989 Rupert Evans Symposium on Vocational Education in Urbana, Illinois and, during feedback sessions with those participating in similar programs, "the same theme came out loud and clear:" "You have people in industry who don't know what teachers have to put up with," he says. "And, on the other hand, you have teachers who went into school straight from college, and don't understand career ladders, company pressures and deadlines."

Several Academy administrators referred to the same problem--many teachers simply hadn't worked in the world of industry. Many entered the teaching profession directly from college without guidance from industry professionals, and their knowledge of the demands of this world -- the world they are ostensibly training these non-college bound children to meet -- was minimal.

"These teachers may not understand why the people in the company can't spend time working with students when they have a project due," says Bush. "The industry people think

that the most important thing is the students coming out to the companies -- but they don't understand how complicated scheduling buses or obtaining parental permission can be."

Bush and the other educators learned that schools needed to work with a number of companies and with a set number of contacts within each company.

On the other side, at least one industry administrator cited distress in the Academy program due to politics within the school. Many industry representatives assume a corporate-like structure of power within the school, and fail to realize the delicacy of the relationship, and sometimes the lack of delineated authority among superintendents, principals, and teachers. Other studies have found that principals have had to lobby for support from their teachers. Teachers had been known to sabotage -- subtly, of course -- programs led by unpopular principals by giving students poor or misleading instructions about where to meet, or when.[7])

At the San Jose East Side School District, the Academy has developed an innovative solution to its collaborative problems. The program, which enrolls 110 students at each of its two locations, uses a full-time "loaned" executive from an industry -- this year, training manager Myra Tincher from Hewlett-Packard. Tincher works with a counterpart from the school district -- in this case, Keith Bush, program manager of the East Side Electronics Academy. Bush attributes a good part of the program's success to this industry-school district working team.

The fact that East Side has an industry insider working full-time with the Academy means that "they buy into it," says Bush. Moreover, with a borrowed industry person, "We bridge the gap caused by differing in-house policies." The two work together as translators and find ways to troubleshoot the inevitable communication and policy problems that crop up.

In addition, the move centralizes Academy services. Instead of East Side's fifteen companies each organizing their programs within the school, integrating summer job programs and scheduling field trips and visits, they can coordinate through one office.

It's a generous commitment from Hewlett Packard, Bush agrees "but that's the part of the program that makes it work."

"Other programs try to educate people to make the program work," says Bush, "but the two worlds -- industry and schools -- just don't mesh enough" to make such an attempt viable.

Now, however, the Academies have moved beyond a 50-50 school-business partnership. The passage in 1984 of a bill to fund replications (a second, stronger bill, SB605, was passed in 1987) has made the State Department of Education a third partner. This, of course, adds considerable strength to the program, but it also adds a few problems of its own.

As Paul Sakamoto, superintendent for the Mountain View/Los Altos Unified School District, notes, "It's hard to get those three groups to work together on anything."

Goodwill, however, was plentiful on all sides. According to Dayton, however, "The biggest hurdle we encountered in getting state support came from the Governor, a cautious man who was unwilling to spend money on programs without evidence of effectiveness." "We got strong, widespread support from the legislature and the State Department of Education -- and that support was bipartisan. Business, too, supported our effort."

Bush, and the others in the Academy programs, remain optimistic. "It's a good program," says Bush, "and it works." But it does, he says, require a great deal of organization -- perhaps more than most are willing to give. "We have volunteers working and, in a lot of cases, working above and beyond their job demands. We have 200 people working on this program. It's very time-consuming to keep track of one hundred mentors who are coming and going," -- for example, changing jobs, or moving to different plants. "The kids, too, are coming and going. It has to be managed. It can't just 'happen.'"

Does It Work?

So far, the Partnership Academies have been a story of success. When the program is implemented properly, says Dayton, "it has convincing outcomes." Among those outcomes, according to Dayton's most recent research (to be published by PACE this year), are an Academy dropout rate that is half the rate for the comparison group.

However, there have been failures. Four Academies -- two at Stockton, one at El Dorado, and one at Coalinga -- have closed.

Dayton was critical of these failed implementation efforts: "In all four cases, the districts hadn't bought into the Academy program. They used the aegis to get state funding, half-heartedly implemented the program, and it didn't work."

Says Michael Kirst, co-director of PACE, which sponsored the evaluations, "It's a full, robust program, and it works. But be warned: you have to buy into the whole thing. When all the components of the program are implemented, it works. When they're squished together, you get mixed results."

For instance, the teachers' free period to work together is vital to the success of their mission -- yet districts are sometimes unwilling to reduce these teachers' workload. Such was the case at Coalinga, whose Academy program folded.

Most often, says Dayton, the program fails because of "lack of adequate school district support, or lack of adequate business support."

"Sometimes the districts haven't bought into the Academy model and don't provide leadership and support. And there has to be continuing private sector support."

"The program will have problems, for example, if there is no active steering committee that meets regularly and is strongly involved."

Though the early results were guardedly positive, the state of California showed an early willingness to back the experiment. In 1984, the legislature passed a bill to fund replication at ten additional sites. By September 1987, legislators passed another bill to continue replication at the rate of up to fifteen sites a year. By fall 1990, a total of 33 programs across the state will offer high school students Academy opportunities in the fields of business, health, computers, electronics, and the building trades.

The program was given a Distinguished Performance Award by the National Alliance of Business in 1987. It was also named as an exemplary program by the National Academy for Vocational Education in 1985, received a Private Sector Initiative commendation from the President of the United States in 1986, and was given extensive media coverage, including

articles in The New York Times, Phi Delta Kappan, and featured in a PBS documentary on dropouts.

The American Institutes for Research (AIR) measured how well the original Peninsula Academies at Sequoia and Menlo-Atherton High Schools met their goals from 1981 to 1986, using attitudes, attendance, grades, graduation rates, and job performance as gauges. The 1986 study compared program participants with a comparison group of similar, at-risk youths. It, too, found the cumulative dropout rate for Academy students to be half that of the comparison group. A 1983 report compared the average daily attendance with non-Academy students, and found Academy attendance was about 90 percent, compared to 75 percent in the comparison group.

The AIR report also surveyed the Academy graduates, and found that 94 percent were working or furthering their education beyond high school, compared to 64 percent in the comparison group.

The jobs Academy students held required more technical skills than the comparison group, the report said, and they earned an average of $60 more per week. They had more long-range career plans, and had sustained these plans after receiving their high school diplomas.

The PACE evaluation, dated April 1988 and surveying all twelve Academy programs in place statewide, was more guarded. It, too, noted that students improved their attitudes and self-esteem at most sites. But, says Dayton, the data were weakened by those sites not adhering to the Academy model.

A more informal evaluation came from J.V. Augustus, coordinator of the mentor program at Lockheed Missiles and Space Co. "The students that participate in the program are motivated, their attendance at work is excellent, their applications and resumes are done exceptionally well, and their attitude about themselves and work is positive."[8] According to the AIR study, the Academy students, over a three-year period, received an average rating of 3.8 on a five-point scale on their work performance. They consistently received scores of over 4.0 on punctuality, reliability, and attitudes.

The students themselves have often been powerful spokespersons of the program's successes. After all, one could argue that many of their problems arise from poor self-esteem and attitudes -- and perhaps they are the best judges of how much those have changed. Here is what a group of students--one of them a Menlo-Atherton's Academy valedictorian--said:

> I'm eighteen and I've had three jobs -- all of them at major companies. I've never tossed a fry or slapped a burger and thanks to the Academy, I won't have to. . .The academy is handing me my future on a silver platter and I am going to take it. Our goal is success. Soon we will see how we handle it and I think I already know: we're going to do it with style, pride, and a 'Don't stop me now' attitude. We will succeed.

Remember: these students had been the schools' underachievers.

Considering the driftlessness their teachers say characterized the students before entering the Academy, their post-graduation plans look surprisingly firm -- perhaps more firm, even, than their non-Academy peers. The Menlo-Atherton "Computer Academy Newsletter" (which is also the students' chance to explore desk-top publishing) notes that of the 26 members of the graduating class of '88 --

- 16 named a specific state university or community college they were planning to attend (several listing the part-time work they planned to use for financial support);
- 2 planned to go to college, but could not yet specify which one; and
- 5 planned a direct entry into the business world, specifying the company they were to work for.

(One also planned to travel to Europe; another to Mexico; and the final grad planned to "record music with two close friends.")

"Call Me Anytime"

On a weekday morning in Raytheon's boardroom, a sedate, carpeted room reserved for business execs, the twenty high school students provide an incongruous scene. Many of them are Hispanics; most wear T-shirts, sweatshirts, or flannel shirts and jeans. One young woman, about sixteen years old, is obviously in the last months of pregnancy. Several of the boys sport shoulder length hair; one, in a baseball cap, has frizzy, unwashed bangs that end somewhere

below the top of his nose. Another teen, in a midriff-length shirt that emphasizes her adult figure, flirts with a boy.

These students are the job-holders of tomorrow, and its easy to theorize even to develop legislation -- without remembering who, exactly, they are. The real success of the Academy, the real determinant of whether or not the program works, is of course these students -- many of whom have been set apart precisely because they are unable to make a success of their lives so far.

But this is an irony rarely referred to by administrators and teachers in the Partnership Academies -- in fact, they specifically warn against reinforcing these children with negative self-images. Said a participant in one of the nation's Academies: "Don't make students feel like low achievers. Make them feel like potential high achievers. Make them feel that being in the Academy is an honor."[9]

These kids are "at risk" says Milt Schmidt, director of the Academy's program at Mountain View High School, where these students at Raytheon come from, so there has been much, already, in their circumstances to bring them down: "Low skills, difficult home situations -- single-parent homes, or welfare homes, or homes where the child, or parents, or both are involved with drugs. They may have an inability to get along with peers something which has been going on for them for years."

Schmidt says these children are by no means incorrigible. They can be thoughtful, courteous and responsive -- depending on the situation.

"They can also be difficult to handle. Pretty generally, in a situation like this one [in the board room], they're nice. Individually, they can be very nice. But in a classroom, or with each other, they revert back to the behavior that got them into the situation they are in."

Despite these problems, teachers seek "level of sincerity, a commitment to wanting to turn things around, to succeed, a gut level feeling from teachers," says Schmidt. In other words, they're looking for borderline students -- ones who just might make it with a little extra push.

Like adolescents everywhere, these students hold a blithe hope that the future will be good to them; they also fear that it will not. As a group they seem blissfully unaware of the dismal statistics for their cohort. They see little connection between what they do in school and the "outside world" -- and so the perceived risk of dropping out becomes minimal. Dropping out, for many of their classmates, has been the easiest option. As one Academy teacher said, "The typical dropout is someone who is dropping out while he's still in school; he's losing grades, she's losing credits, he's getting further and further behind. Pretty soon, it's just too hard to catch up."[10]

According to recent estimates, the male high school dropout will earn $260,000 less over his lifetime than a graduate; a female dropout loses about $200,000. The dropouts from a single graduating class in a large urban district were estimated to lose $200 billion in earnings over a lifetime -- and about $60 billion in lost tax revenues.[11] These figures do not consider the cost to business, which is already facing a labor market that lacks necessary education and skills -- nor does it consider the enormous social and psychological costs to society as a whole.

In a study that surveyed high school dropouts years later (when they were 21-25 years old), only a quarter scored well enough on a national test to indicate that they could follow directions from one place to another using a map. Just over 20 percent showed the skills that would enable them to balance a checkbook.[12]

Closer to the initial site district, the statistics were no rosier: Some minority students in San Mateo County, where the Sequoia District is located, live in areas where the dropout rate exceeds 70 percent. The East Side Union High School District -- where Bush's Academy program is located -- has an annual dropout rate of 35-40 percent.[13]

"There's an old saying, 'Call me anytime -- but call me,'" says a Raytheon administrator for Computech. "For many of these kids, this is the only attention they get from anyone."

For the kids at Raytheon, "tomorrow" will likely come sooner than for their more privileged peers elsewhere. Statistically, they are not likely college material. But watching them, one wonders... The most unpromising among them, the one with the unwashed hair and baseball cap, asks the Raytheon engineers a few laconic questions that show he is informed

and engaged. It's just enough to inspire one's hopes. And hope, realistic hope, is exactly what these kids and their future employers need.

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